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Joel R. Fickel

Western Kentucky University, Joel.Fickel616@topper.wku.edu

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PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON
JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK
AND A DECLARATION OF IDEALS

A Capstone Experience/Thesis Project
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Honors Self-Designed Studies:
Integrated Visual and Performing Arts Practice and Theory
with Honors Graduate Distinction at Western Kentucky University

By

Joel R. Fickel

Western Kentucky University
2012

CE/T Committee

Professor Kristina Arnold, Advisor

Professor Trevor Martin,
School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Professor Courte Voorhees

Approved by

Advisor
Department of Art

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2012

ABSTRACT

Approximately one year ago, I founded an experimental theater group on the campus of Western Kentucky University called The Corporate Surrealists of America. The group is made up of artists from radically different departments and disciplines and is focused on fostering an alternative kind of performance that is both richly multi-disciplinary and seriously concerned with burning political, social, and historical issues. One of the group's main tenets has been to attempt to make art in the periphery of an institution as much as possible. Several thrilling independent productions were mounted including *NIGHT RAID*, *WITH THESE MY HANDS OF THE BARBARIAN*, and *A COURTROOM DRAMA OF REBIRTH*. The most recent project was a culmination in many ways. The play was an original called *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK* and was staged in Van Meter Auditorium in November of 2012. The ideas of this poetic drama grew from the words and lives of Rudyard Kipling, Bertolt Brecht, Vandana Shiva, and Ross Caputi, among others. It centers on the subject of water examined through political, spiritual, anthropological, ethical, economic, philosophical, historical, militaristic, and aesthetic lenses.

Keywords: water rights, experimental theater, war, Brecht, Kipling, Islam

Dedicated to future generations of artists, thinkers, and provocateurs
and to the wise hands of my mother

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There are far too many deserving souls to fit on one page—individuals that have offered all of themselves in service of a common vision—but I shall try my best. I would like to first thank Kristina Arnold, without whose intelligence, generosity, and inexhaustible patience I would be nothing. Trevor Martin has been an incredible source of expansion in all areas of my life and work. For his love, warmth, support, wisdom, and invaluable teachings, I will always be infinitely grateful. Peter Sellars allowed me into his world, nurtured me, made me cry, made me laugh, taught me a great deal, and gave me permission to bring the universe into my heart and my heart into the universe. I hope that I have done Ross Caputi's experiences as a soldier in Iraq due justice and that, if he had been able to see the play I wrote, he would recognize all the stark sincerity, the ambiguities, and the inexpressible emotional layers. Leslie Baylis must be commended for her patience, openness, and trust in me. Gordon Baylis and the Office of Scholar Development took a risk on this ambitious project and I'm forever grateful for being given the FUSE Grant. Governor's School for the Arts provided a Toyota Alumni Fund for this project and must be lauded as one of the most powerful forces of good in Kentucky. The Honors College provided funding (CE/T Excellence Grant and Honors Developmental Grant) that helped make the project soar. Wolfgang Brauner provided constant support and encouragement. I am lucky to have Courte Voorhees as my third

reader and I cannot wait to hold exciting and probing conversations with him about the work. The entire cast and crew of *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK* are some of the most amazing beings and are everyday changing the world in which we live. Additional thanks must go to the following people for reasons they know well: Jeff Smith, Matthew Love, Jarred Halcomb, Kathy Fickel, and Dalton Rowe. The entire original production of *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK* was meant as an offering of thanks to these beautiful people and all others who helped bring something of immense splendor, courage, and integrity into the world and in so doing changed my life forever.

VITA

November 1, 1989.....Born – Lexington, Kentucky

2006.....Kentucky Governor’s School for the Arts

2008.....Graduated from Spencer County High
School, Taylorsville, Kentucky.
Rank: 5/163

2008.....Full scholarship to Western Kentucky
University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major: Honors Self-Designed Studies, Integrated Visual and Performing Arts: Practice and Theory

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CHAPTER ONE

A DECLARATION

My entire journey through academe has been predicated on a single obnoxious idea: a constant search for unbeaten paths. From the earliest age, I was driven by an antiestablishment impulse, an almost dysfunctional urge to dissent and form an identity of my own, bound by sharp contours. Assignments are simply there to show me what not to do. I am highly sensitive to external restriction, guidance, and what I perceive to be easy answers. This is a blessing and a curse, a cliché and a rarity. I have often appeared obstinately anti-academic to others but this is not so. It has taken me time to realize what I need from the collegial environment and how to obtain it under my own aegis. Though at times introverted and self-effacing on the surface, the fire of leadership burns deep within me and it burns bright. This is a prerequisite for an artist and always has been. Particularly at a time when the large cultural institutions are crumbling all over the world, the drive to create new structures—which are built from the bottom up—is vital.

The reader of this thesis should not expect an orthodox series of monolithic, objective essays that have blossomed from months of theoretical research and data-collection. I am not merely an essayist, not merely a data collector, not merely a student. I am a director—a community organizer and an artist in one. My truest forms of communication are in the performing arts and video. I independently wrote, produced, and directed a play called *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK* and in the work itself is

where my deepest research, feeling, and thinking lie. It was the culmination of two years of continuous research and intense contemplation as well as a lifetime of moral and spiritual education. The essay can only represent a minuscule fraction of what it is to be human. Art, music, and poetry plunge leagues deeper, as eastern cultures have known for thousands of years. Only these things can speak to the gods and only these things can raise the dead. What I hope to accomplish here is a deliberately concise piece of writing that offers insights into my writing, conceptualization, ideals, and inspiration but is ultimately a crude translation of the real work I did for the stage. It is a kind of textual and conceptual analysis intended for those who saw the play live as well as those in whose imaginations it must dwell. It will function as an expanded form of the artist statement, a very brief piece of personal writing meant to accompany a visual artist's body of work. As with the artist's statement, these writings can only operate as a preliminary way into an artist's mind and heart, a means of orienting the viewer but not an end in itself. I will resist excessively describing my production choices and instead focus on the meaning the work as a whole with emphasis on the text. A separate publication would be necessary to illuminate all the many details of the production. This thesis should not be taken as a substitute for the live performance, even with stills and video clips attached. Theater must not be despoiled by a virtual presence being mistaken for a real presence.

It is crucial to emphasize that a director is not an auteur and I am also not a performance artist. Theater is nothing more than the sparks created when a group of people comes together in the same space at the same time. One of the most astonishing things I have discovered in the last several years is a dedication to collaboration that has

emerged from steady dissolution of my ego. Not one thing I do now would be possible without the hands, hearts, and minds of my friends. I spent my high school years working hermetically on video—a lone painter with a camcorder. This continued into college when I entered the art department and explored sculpture and installation art for a time. This satisfied one part of me but what was missing was the opportunity to work on large-scale projects with friends whose talents and vision I had admired from afar. Meaningful collaboration is no walk in the park. Like justice, it is an ideal striven for beautifully but never fully touched.

Several times I slid quietly in and out of the university's theater department. While meeting a handful of inspiring people, I grew extremely disenchanted with the lack to interest in experimentation and new work. I eventually came to the conclusion that most theater departments in the nation resembled mine. Many of the students I met and even the faculty seemed to lack sense of, or passion for, theater history let alone the history of any other major art form. Their vision of what theater could be was represented by a much more conservative, commercial approach than I desired. I saw a disconnect from the contemporary social, political, and spiritual landscape, from the most burning human issues and questions being handed to my generation. The Greeks did not invent theater to have it turn into trifles light as air. I am not a propagandist or an advertiser but it has always been the task of the artist to speak to larger climatic movements and to engage the world as it changes in real time. So much of the theater I have experienced in my life has been lamentably irrelevant and materialistic. Where are the theater artists with the larger worldview, I asked myself, with a preoccupation with the political, the cosmic, and cosmically political?

There was a small faction of others with similar feelings but no ideas about how to escape the old systems. An energetic idealist, I wanted my hands in many different areas but felt strangely out of place everywhere I wandered. In countless universities around the nation, the arts departments have grown increasingly segmented, even antipathetic towards one another. I wanted my painter friends to be talking to my actor friends, my musician friends to be collaborating with my poet friends. The current insular approach of the conventional theater department dishonors the intrinsically interdisciplinary nature of theater. Theater is not actually an art form per se. It is an immense complex of genuinely distinct forms in concert with one another.

But alas, here was no exception at my university. I fell into poisoned pits of depression and self-doubt. I had had enough. No more would I await permission to do what I needed to do. No more would I sit idly for the grievance officer who would never come. I think there is a critical point in a student's life in which he must dramatically throw off the student vestment to reveal an active-minded contributor.

At the end of my junior year at Western Kentucky University, I did several things. I liberated myself internally. I designed my own major through the Honors College and titled it "Integrated Visual and Performing Arts: Practice and Theory." This allowed me to continue crossing departmental boundaries, meeting diverse individuals, and receiving a much larger image of the world. I had untied weights of fear that were long bound to my feet. Things opened in ways they never had before. I found myself in music history classes, anthropology classes, and philosophy classes. I went to India with a group of ethnographic video students and then drove to Santa Fe, New Mexico for a month to assist and shadow renowned opera director Peter Sellars for whom I have much respect. I

had previously traveled to Chicago to see his production of Handel's great oratorio *Hercules*, which penetrates the crises of a great soldier's traumatic homecoming. It moved me beyond words and took what I thought theater was and flipped it upside down. I came back from that summer charged with a blazing new dynamism that had been percolating over previous years. I founded an official student organization through the university called The Corporate Surrealists of America. It was imagined as a group of artists, activists, and friends from multiple disciplines and departments that would come together to stage aesthetically radical plays with the deepest conviction, seriousness, and sensitivity. We are driven by Bertolt Brecht's essential idea about the function of art: To ask the question, *what is a human being?* We are not ironists. We are not students of theater. We are the next generation of artists with a grand vision, standing up to declare that a new world is on the way. Our work prior to JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK will be discussed in Chapter Two.

This thesis is finally a simple, open hand extended to future students—ambitious, passionate, and eager but uncertain of how to live and work within the stuffy sweater of an institution. This is my very personal and honest way of showing the next generation that the act of realizing a vision is right now at your fingertips. It isn't you that is waiting on the world; the world is waiting on you. This is dedicated to them. Peter Sellars often brings up a simple, three-step process of art making: "Imagine the world you want to live in, create that world, and live in it." When confronted with the realization that the kind of theater we needed to see and make was no where in sight, we had either to retreat further into a bitter cynicism as so many disillusioned young artists do, or we had to

acknowledge that the open space was waiting to be filled by us and us alone. I want to throw light on that space so others may achieve much more than we have.

CHAPTER TWO

PAST WORKS

MURDERER, THE HOPE OF WOMEN

In December of 2010, just before I cut ties with the theater department, I staged a mysterious five-page play by Austrian painter Oskar Kokoschka. It was the final project for my Directing I class. Ninety percent of the class I found completely unsatisfying but it was redeemed at the end by being given the chance to direct a short exactly the way I wanted. Kokoschka wrote and staged the play, called “Murderer, the Hope of Women,” around 1909 when he was only twenty-three. He had had no prior experience with the theater and from this ignorance he helped change theater history. The play was one of the first examples of Expressionism in the theater. It emitted the pungent fumes of late Romanticism and broke the ground for later avant-garde movements such as Surrealism, Futurism, and Absurdism. What moved me the most was the idea of this radical artist close to my age attacking the theater from the vantage point of painting. The sheer vitality and poetic violence of it literally caused a riot at the world premiere. Kokoschka envisioned a new theater that could be just as much in the history of painting as in the history of theater. My multimedia production included six young actors clad in plain clothes and a spare set that centered around a rectangular video screen, guarded by a stark black gate, which doubled as a door illuminated by flashes of projected fire, smoke, sparks, sunsets, and screaming faces. I focused as much attention on the visual mise en

scene as I did on shaping white-hot operatic explosions of emotion into a seventh element of design.

From fall of 2011 to spring of 2012, what would eventually be The Corporate Surrealists of America mounted three major plays in spaces around the campus of Western Kentucky University. We worked with almost no budget or resources.

NIGHT RAID

I collaged the text for this production using material written by American poets James Oppenheim and Maxwell Bodenheim as well as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, a great 12th century Muslim philosopher. Drawing from my previous interest in Expressionism, the performance was opera without music. Performed by a man and a woman, I staged it in an amazing space—a large gnarled alleyway, lit by murky streetlights, between the two libraries on campus. The space, the weather, the light, the natural sounds collectively became a third performer. I set it ambiguously in a bombed out city in either Iraq or Afghanistan. Two strangers come together having just lost everything in the middle of the night and realize by morning that their shared response to unimaginable pain is the only thing that will keep them alive. The pain was entered without flinching by the actors—an amazing ignition of the text by shockingly courageous performances. While visually my interpretation of the text was contemporary, the spacious and “mythological” qualities of the text exploded a current political crisis into a deeply universal set of moral questions. The set design was the given environment of the alleyway and a single shrouded corpse illuminated by green “night-vision” video projected from above. My friends in the film

and graphic design departments (Jarred Halcomb and Matthew Love, respectively) designed the sound and a sculpture student (Derek Hildesheim) designed the video projection setup.



Figure 2.1 Scene from NIGHT RAID featuring actor Max Newland. Photo by Dalton Rowe. 2011.

WITH THESE MY HANDS OF THE BARBARIAN

This performance was staged in a hallway and visual art display case in Ivan Wilson Fine Arts Center. A sculpture student again constructed the set pieces. The first half consisted of me speaking a long monologue adaptation of the Medea myth, written by Heiner Mueller and translated from German into English by Dennis Redmond. After first

presenting the image of myself being water boarded, I donned a kimono the color of a prison uniform and continued speaking the text, which dealt brutally with imperialism, imprisonment, demonization, and xenophobia. I had been fasting for ten days before the performance. The second half was my own modern adaptation of Zeami's 14th century play *Yamauba*. Yamauba was a protean Japanese witch, quietly exiled in the mountains and demonized beyond reason by society. Barbarism and the unknown other were themes that linked the characters of Medea, Yamauba, and an anonymous prisoner in Guantanamo Bay facing charges of terrorism.



Figure 2.2 Video still from WITH THESE MY HANDS OF THE BARBARIAN featuring (l-r) Luke Jean, Joel Fickel, and Morgan Howard. 2011.

A COURTROOM DRAMA OF REBIRTH

In spring of 2012, I decided to stage an ancient play titled *A Masked Drama of Rebirth*, found in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. The mystery play was meant historically as a means of teaching the Buddhist cosmology and illustrating through drama the consequences of virtue and vice. Many of the vices described were, in my view, related to desecration of the environment. I saw it as an ecologically driven text, drawing a line from the health of the natural world to the health of the whole universe. After receiving the blessings of the translator, I staged it as a contemporary courtroom drama about coal mining in Kentucky. I did not write anything new for it and, with the exception of a few cuts, it was performed intact. I put it in DUC auditorium during Earth Week. There is almost no story and no narrative tension found in the text. It is meant as a populist ritual that may be seen and understood by anyone. To my knowledge, it is still performed in India and Tibet today. Its structure is symmetrical. The first half deals with a selfish man who had laid waste to the landscape and denied the existence of a spiritual dimension. I made him the wealthy CEO of a big coal corporation. The second deals with a virtuous almsgiver. The performance included a skull puppet by Derek Hildesheim, a sound score by Jarred Halcomb, recorded violin music by a student player in the music department, and projected photos of coal mining devastation in Appalachia taken by a University of Kentucky professor. My hope is to revive the show in the coming years in other places throughout Appalachia. If I were to take it to New York or Chicago, it would not have the resonance it does in the context of Kentucky. This was my first attempt to make a piece specifically about my home state.



Figure 2.3 From A COURTROOM DRAMA OF REBIRTH featuring Alex Little (in blue mask). Photo by Connor Choate. 2012.



Figure 2.4 From A COURTROOM DRAMA OF REBIRTH featuring Matt Bitner and Hannah Hadley. Photo by Connor Choate. 2012.

CHAPTER THREE

JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK

The seed for *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK* was planted even before any of the works discussed in the previous chapter had been conceived. In 2009, I read a short play by Bertolt Brecht—the shining sun in the solar system of twentieth century German theater—called *The Exception and the Rule*. It was written in the early thirties and holds a prominent spot among Brecht’s *Lehrstücke*, or didactic plays. This series was the German’s purest expression of transparent Marxist agitprop, influenced by traditional Chinese musical theater and literally intended to be taken into factories and primary schools. *The Exception and the Rule* is a musico-dialectical fable of economic globalization and slavery. Its mythic cast of characters, rife with archetypes, includes a power mad oil merchant closing a big deal in the Mongolian desert and his servant, abused yet softhearted and along for the killing. The two end up stranded amid sand dunes together with little water on which to survive. Class differences bring the merchant’s distrust to a fatal high. The servant realizes that if his master dies, the courts will surely blame the man with less to lose. In a moment mixed with cynicism and sincerity, the servant opts to give his last bit of water to the merchant. The merchant ends up putting a bullet in the slave after mistaking his canteen for a rock meant for bludgeoning. The final scene is a courtroom in which the guilty man is absolved because the judge concludes that only the worst in the servant must be believed. Because the

stakes of survival were so dire, the servant, obviously driven only by his own well-being and prosperity, could only attempt a murder. Why would he give his last bit of water to the man who clearly abhors him?

I saw many cogent and moving points in what Brecht was arguing and a high potential for contemporary resonance. I had been researching the global issue of water commodification by multi-national corporations and I saw in the Brecht a potent vision of water as a shared human right, despite the presence of water being a relatively subtextual point in Brecht's Marx-heavy schema. Above all, it put its finger on a capitalism unbounded by any sense of ethics, a nightmarish kind of freedom. Unfortunately, the play itself suffered from stilted dialogue, a cardboard structure, and a child's level of complexity, as Brecht had ostensibly intended. Brecht did not relish language in this outing and the stale translation by Eric Bentley did not help. I decided early on that if I were going to invoke any of this play, it would need to be radically transformed. During my time in Santa Fe with my mentor, the experimental opera director Peter Sellars, two extraordinary things were given to me. First, I was encouraged by the impresario to move forward with my ideas but with an original play that I would write, a play that speaks to here and now. Second, Brecht did not write *The Exception and the Rule* in a vacuum. Sellars showed me that the German was writing from the surprising example of Rudyard Kipling. Whole studies have been dedicated to comparative analyses of the two European authors, I later discovered. Reading Kipling's seminal 1892 poem, *Gunga Din*, I saw very clearly how Brecht's imagination was working through that of the controversial British poet and journalist.

The short poem is told through the voice of an unnamed soldier stationed in the deserts of occupied India. Kipling's characteristic use of the specific dialects and the caricatured colloquialisms of proletarian people inspired Brecht enormously throughout his career. He used the language of the masses to create poetry with the same complexity and prolific imagination of Shakespeare. The soldier creates a valorized portrait of Gunga Din, his regiment's invisible water-carrier—a Muslim, a native of India, and an abused service worker for the British army. Gunga Din's task is to carry his large leather bag of water onto the battlefield, unprotected by armor or weapon, so that wounded, dehydrated, or dying troops may have their special time to drink. Despite the poem's brevity, all historical implications of racism and classism remain intact and legible but Kipling's moral stance is not quite overt. Din ends up shot, like Brecht's servant-martyr, but not at the hand of the narrating British soldier, who admits in the end to the water-carrier's superior character. Much more so than Brecht, Kipling centers water as the overarching image. As in much of Kipling's poetry, the corniness is often cut with something slightly deeper, more telling about Kipling and the world he inhabited than the surface might portend.

I saw almost immediately how to make my own play, reflective of my own time while focused on the larger movements of human history, from this source. Kipling would in some way become my subject. I would largely shun Brecht but do as he did—go back to Kipling as my *prima materia*, this time to stir a discussion on water, India, Islam, and the American military. For several years, I've been extremely concerned about Islam and its presence, distortion, and misinterpretation in the climate of post-9/11 America. My work has been a means of personally testing my own ignorance and

spiritual curiosity. As Shakespeare said, art is always a path to self-knowledge. The new play would end up a logical emergence from the plays I would direct in fall of 2011 and spring of 2012.

I am not the kind of writer who can sit in an empty room with a sheet of paper and just start going. I'm an omnivorous transformer. I believe research and a personal awareness of the contemporary world are essential for the artist. More and more I have come to see strange congruities between the work of the journalist and the work of the artist. I have freelanced often for the newspaper continuously during my college years. Kipling often turned his journalistic assignments into poems we still have and love. For art, I go to newspaper archives, memoirs, biographies, history books, holy books, and scientific studies and statistics. I surround myself with the work of poet-guides and aesthetic exemplars; I marinate in their ideas, not to imitate or pastiche but to know how high the ladder can go. It is critical to be haunted by ghosts when making art. Through this process, Kipling became an enormous presence in the project. I spent the entire summer of 2012 putting my ideas into action and writing *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK*.

In this play, I envisioned the next turn on the wheel of history—a fictional occupation of India by America, echoing what the British had done in centuries past. The parallels to Iraq and Afghanistan would be more than apparent. In reality, India—which contains a significant Muslim population—is a water-stressed country. It has already been suggested that if the wars of the twentieth century were fought over oil, the wars of future centuries will be fought over water. Coca-Cola, an impressively megalomaniacal corporation desperately attempting to breach the Indian market and buy up community-

owned water sources, has thrown billions of dollars at the country. Coke's primary tactic is to force the governments of non-participant citizens into their cutthroat marathon race of unrestricted capitalism. Expensive Trojan horses from western nations often show up at the gates of villages in developing countries such as India. In that subcontinent, these Trojan horses have often been met with women-led sit-in strikes outside factories. Day after day, they protest the theft of their right to share the Earth's basic sustenance. In the southern state of Kerala, Coca-Cola was vehemently accused of over-extracting water and illegally dumping heavy chemicals into the surrounding land. Enormous protests led by residents, farmers, and civil rights groups were held continuously for years until the state courts ruled against the corporation and shut the large plant down in 2005. While the battle to expurgate Coke from India continues with ardor, this moment has become a gleaming signpost for millions of Indian citizens and will live on as a source of sustainable moral energy. Physicist, ecologist, and charismatic activist Vandana Shiva has written extensively on the movement against the anti-human actions of Coca-Cola happening globally. She often came to Kerala to speak to the strikers and keep the spirits lifted. Her feverish 2008 book, *Water Wars*, was a key source when writing *JUMAH COLA*.



Figure 3.1 Jumah, played by Max Newland. Photo by Daniel Peach. Van Meter Auditorium, 2012.

It isn't easy to describe the narrative of *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK*, if one would like to ascribe such a narrative to it. I have never been enthralled with the way contemporary playwrights approach performance texts. They place too many limitations on themselves and their imaginations. Burdened ultimately by psychology, they distinguish themselves too heartily from poets, composers, and painters. I am much more inspired by Zeami, Shakespeare, the Greek trio of Euripides, Aeschylus, and Sophocles, and the early twentieth century resurgence of poetic drama within avant-garde circles. I try to write in a very constructed, imagistic mode. *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK* is closer to a long form poem than a play. I try to write solid, epigrammatic lines of dialogue that would never be spoken in everyday conversation yet are filled to the brim with truth, symbol, emotion, artifice, and color—expressive feasts for the senses and the

intellect alike. Long speeches permeate as a way to get beyond storytelling. I also tend to write like a librettist. The best librettos in opera history have made use of the smallest amount of language to open on a thousand images and a thousand different emotions. No sentence is dispensable, no word accidental. There is freedom yet there is also structure.

JUMAH COLA is consciously reduced to the most basic story elements and time is exploded in all directions. A prelude monologue that could be spoken by anyone opens the piece—a lengthy, scolding jeremiad about Kipling and his son, a soldier who died in World War I defending the Crown. In my November production, I put these words in the mouth of a drug-addicted American troop who torments a prisoner in mask. Images of the events at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay are inculcated. Then, to establish the fractured, dystopian world of the play, the Chorus of Soldiers and a character called Gunga Din speak the first several pages, which shoot out in toothy sound bites devoid of character development or narrative continuity. As such, many elements are left very open-ended. Only the most vital stage directions are written. The Chorus could be played by two people (as in my production) or twenty people. Gunga Din could be portrayed by a live person of any gender or race or a vacant, artificially created digital voice (as in my production). Coming from a strong visual arts background, I hold true to the elements and principles of design. Contrast, balance, repetition, rhythm, color, and texture are my driving impulses. Similarly, music was the bedrock of my education for years. I write words in a way similar to a composer. I think and select in terms of dynamics, movement, tempo, syncopation, rhythm, beat, theme, variation, and harmony. This is how I write and this is how I direct.



Figure 3.2 A member of the Chorus (left, played by Josh San Miguel) mentally tortures an anonymous prisoner (played by painter Chasen Igleheart) in mask during the opening monologue about Kipling's fallen son. Igleheart later portrays the soldier who kills Jumah.

Enter The Herald, another character device lifted from ancient Greek tragedy.

This asexual figure could be interpreted in a cornucopia of ways. She comes representing multiple ideologies. She establishes the drive behind America's quest to hold a monopoly over all water on Earth. At times she is the Secretary of State. She is also a celebrity come to drum up morale among the troops. She is a ferocious CEO, barking a dogmatic doctrine of free trade. She is a cabaret performer. She is a vaudeville comedienne. She is a war-mongering queen. She is an entire Baroque opera in one person. She is a president. She is a messenger. She is a full publicity machine in high heels. She is a preacher. The Herald comes in like an element of nature, a beast with seven heads, a hurricane of rigid ideology and strangling moralism. She is both brilliant and self-righteous hellraiser and

delirious Whore of Babylon, eventually collapsing under her own excess after a magnificent and interminable regurgitation of slogans and hate speech.



Figure 3.3 The Herald (played by WKU Forensic Team member Sarah Brazier) enters. Photo by Mary Helen Nunn. 2012.

I deliberately wrote The Herald and staged her as an absurd cartoon character. But, not satisfied with caricature as Brecht was, in my staging, I allowed her space in the end to finally become human. Much of her speechifying indicates that America's growing use of drones has rendered, in the play's time-space, death in the American military a thing of the distant past. She and the chorus boast of an elimination of corporeality from the American consciousness—a total separation from the pain and blood of war. The idea of public space in this country and on the global stage is shrinking in popularity namely among corporate godheads, globetrotting the Earth as if it were the Wild West all over again—yet still remaining virtually detached from the moral

consequences of their own quest for profit. Incidentally, the same is true of conflicts like those in Iraq and Afghanistan at the beginning of the 21st century. The quest for global democracy comes with a denial of the blood that floods its foundations. When the remains of an American soldier are discovered but not explained, The Herald can say no more. The single death of one of her own becomes a blasting siren. She screams and melts down to a nauseated crawl, leaving the theater choking and crying. I'm convinced that The Herald is the surreal leftovers from what was the oil merchant of *The Exception and the Rule*. Here, however, the character is not condemned to a status of evil. We simply need to take another look to see a desperate person.



Figure 3.4 The Herald (Sarah Brazier) drums up hate with vaudevillian panache. Photo by Mary Helen Nunn. 2012.

Counterpointed with The Herald's performance is the introduction of Jumah, my central character. Jumah, a hard-bitten Muslim-American soldier, is a transformed Gunga Din. Kipling's idea for his poem came from an historical water-carrier called Jumah, a legend within the 19th century British desert convoy. My version of Jumah is not as loyal to the military he works for. He is embittered by what he sees as a morally corrupt occupation. He is isolated from his family who fought tooth-and-nail to stop him from throwing himself into a war in which the blood of innocent Muslims would inevitably end up staining his hands. He is alienated by other soldiers who hand him ambivalence at best, violent disgust at worst. Oily fear is laid on the canvas with stifling impasto gestures. During Jumah's secret prayer—a quiet simultaneous whisper layered over The Herald's bombast—the Chorus beats him and rips his Qur'an to shreds. Humiliation dissolves all. He begins to believe that the religion that has shaped his worldview is wrong and the cracking of his identity is experienced as unimaginable pain. He reaches the lowest point of his life. From this vantage point, we can see the deepest parts of him.



Figure 3.5 Jumah (played by Max Newland) enters carrying archaic-style water pots. Photo by Mary Helen Nunn. 2012.

Features in major newspapers have been published sporadically over the past decade investigating the complex position of Muslim-American soldiers fighting in the Middle East. The physical and mental abuses that Jumah is put through and his conflicting senses of duty come directly from testimony found in these articles. There are several thousand Muslims in the American military today and each one has a different story to tell, both inspiring and heartbreaking. I also worked from unfinished, unpublished Iraq War memoirs by Ross Caputi, a former soldier who now heads the Justice for Fallujah Project. His reflections worked their way into the text in mysterious ways—crass American military slang, disturbing images of violence, and personal undertones of anger, confusion, and cynicism. My hope was to synthesize this material to create a many-shaded moral crisis within Jumah and make him the mouthpiece for the

corrosive paranoia, blatant religious intolerance, and militaristic zeal that has steadily built in America following 9/11.

In his desperate fit of self-hatred and guilt, Jumah looks to Hajar, a mysterious, iron-willed protester in an American military prison, for solace and guidance. This solitary Muslim woman, fighting peacefully for the return of her country's water from the hands of The Herald, prophesies every single unpleasant detail of Jumah's imminent death. Any sense of plot is further suspended. There are no twists, no suspense, just one long, excruciating prophecy. The Prometheus myth reverses. Hajar is an amalgamation of several prominent female Indian activists. She becomes an oracle, foreseeing every detail of Jumah's death at the hands of a fellow soldier who is the epic personification of ignorance and incomprehensible cruelty.

Hajar is a legendary woman in both Islam and Judaism. In the Muslim tradition, there are two versions of her story. Cast out into the Arabian deserts with her young son Isma'eel, she showed incredible courage and refused to give up the walking search for water. In one version, Isma'eel discovers the Zam Zam well and in another, the angel Jabreel descends and opens the earth with his wing, causing water to flow. Zam Zam is a well in the center of Mecca that has not been exhausted for centuries. It is still visited every year by millions of pilgrims and treated as the holiest water on Earth, the most definitive miracle. Islam, in this sense, was built around water as a gift from God.



Figure 3.6 Jumah's (Max Newland) anger turns into desperate need, as he can no longer listen to the details of his coming death. He reaches to Hajar (played by WKU Forensic Team member Kristina Medero) inside her prison cell. Photo by Daniel Peach, 2012.

Only Jumah, Hajar, and the silent soldier who will eventually murder Jumah populate the second half of the play. The fellow soldier remains onstage the entire time without speaking, without moving, and without a name. He exists as a harbinger in his own hermetic time and space, dehydrating in real time under the scorching Indian sun. Hajar relates in long, florid, explicitly violent speeches that Jumah will end up stranded in the desert with the anonymous man, both of them sweaty, running low on water, but suffocating under paranoia and an intractable distrust. Her language is clinical and precise and, at the same time, pure poetry. By the hand of fate, Jumah will be the last left with water and will have to decide what to do with it. Regardless of his choice, she envisages, the situation will end the same: Jumah's murder in cold blood. Having Hajar

set up this singular image, I ask several questions. What amount of self-sacrifice is possible under circumstances in which death's breath can be felt on one's face? In a world in which water is nothing but a commodity, is it only natural keep for oneself the last bit of life in one's canteen? In what way does pricing a basic human right inherently devalue it? How does giving the last drops of water you have to another in need become a spiritual necessity? How does not considering self-sacrifice as a daily act indicate a spiritual crisis? These are the central questions of the entire piece.



Figure 3.7 Hajar (Kristina Medero) explains to a hysterical Jumah (Max Newland) how his coming deed of compassion and ensuing death will not be remembered accurately if at all. Photo by Daniel Peach, 2012.

In many of the world's religions, it is forbidden to give alms in public—lest it be a pompous act of show on the part of the giver. Hajar ends her prophesy by telling Jumah, who is now on his knees begging for her help and hating her for speaking what he

knows to be the truth, that he will never be honored for courageously giving the last of his water to his murderer. His act of generosity will never make world news. His murderer may very well be absolved after claiming self-defense and Jumah himself may be remembered as simply another fundamentalist Muslim. We would see the worst kind of fear emerge from an uneducated, unsympathetic nation and an assumption based ultimately on bigotry and xenophobia, again echoing *The Exception and the Rule*. Still, Jumah must not give into this toxic reality by deciding to answer it with an act of reactionary violence. He must let go of himself. The Greeks understood that if a democracy is going to acknowledge an enemy, it must first acknowledge them as human beings. Hajar's final words could be perceived as cruel and sadistic until one recognizes her compassionate point—that Jumah must save this man's life for the sake of saving his life, not for want of valor or even salvation of Islam's name in the eyes of the world. She attempts to dissolve his ego so that his act of love may be pure as the purest water before he walks towards his inevitable death, which he does at the end of the play.



Figure 3.8 Jumah (Max Newland) gives a hate filled, dying soldier (played by painter Chasen Igleheart) his last drops of water before being shot by the same man in the climax of the play. Photo by Daniel Peach. 2012.

As per Bertolt Brecht, in order to see a clearer vision of what humanity might be, I race to the most basic element of life on this planet. Religion has always dealt with water in a metaphysical way, not just in a material way. It isn't just something that comes in bottles out of the Dasani machine when one is parched. It is a means of reaching the divine through an inner purification. *Gunga Din* and *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK* both speak to the invisible heroism of the traditional Muslim water-carrier, facing bomb and bullet on the battlefield to give water to soldiers in need. The phenomenon of this small, fundamental act of sharing your last sips of water with the dying person by your side becomes, in a war over water, an act of unspeakably blinding beauty and the world's only hope. Jumah has every reason and right to be furious and continue to putrefy in his fumes of humiliation and hostility. He has already responded to this with bursts of

appalling violence, towards the country of India and towards his fellow soldier. In the end, he must see that even in a hateful, cynical world that is shooting flames and seems bent against him, the offer of life to another—the response of gentle kindness, compassion, and water—is always at hand.



Figure 3.9 The final image of the play. Hajar (Kristina Medero) lays flower petals on the corpse of Jumah (Max Newland) after she has laid a *chadar*, or death shroud, over top of him. Jumah's murderer (Chasen Igleheart) sits in the foreground.

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The following is a series of books, essays, plays, poems and articles that formed the most important research I did while writing *JUMAH COLA TIME TO DRINK*.

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-I contacted Ross Caputi earlier in 2012 about his experiences serving as a soldier in Iraq. Caputi has become highly critical of the American military actions of the past decade. We talked through e-mail often and he was gracious enough to send me his memoirs that he has been writing. From this, I culled contemporary colloquialisms used by the Americans and small details about Caputi's life and time in Iraq. There is also an air of bitterness, cynicism, and heartbreak to these writings that I tried to represent accurately in the poetry.

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